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Joan of Arc: Saint?
by
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Joan of Arc is one of the most important figures in French history. As we all know, she was the improbable and unexpected warrior who appeared miraculously out of nowhere and who singled-handedly saved France at the end of the Hundred Years' War. In the centuries following her death, Joan became a national symbol inextricably linked to the church, the army, and the monarchy. While at first Joan's role as national hero was straight-forward and self-evident, in the mid-nineteenth century it became more problematic. My subject today is how and why that change took place.

First, let us review the pertinent facts about her. Joan was born in 1412 in the town of Dorémy in Lorraine. Legend depicts her as a peasant shepherdess who was called from her flock by voices that she attributed to Saint Michael the Archangel, Saint Catherine, and Saint Marguerite. The Hundred Years' War had begun in 1340 when the English invoked historical claims on the French throne. On Saint Crispin's Day, of Shakespearean fame, in 1415, Henry V won the decisive battle of Agincourt. Five years later in the Treaty

of Troyes, King Charles VI recognized Henry as the heir-apparent to the French throne because he suspected that his own son, the Dauphin, was illegitimate. He had reason to wonder: his own wife, the queen, was notoriously promiscuous. However, Henry died suddenly in 1422, three months before Charles, so his right to succession became moot. The unfortunate fact that Charles suffered recurring bouts of insanity, hence his epithet Charles le Fou (the Mad), threw internal French politics into additional turmoil. Charles VI's brother, Louis of Orléans, claimed the throne as did Jean sans Peur of Burgundy. This produced a civil war on top of the English invasion. The Burgundians allied with the English in the hopes of territorial expansion; the French divided between the tainted Dauphin and his uncle Orléans. For seven years, France was without a king and leader. Weak and vacillating, the Dauphin was unable to go to Rheims where French kings were traditionally crowned because the English and the Burgundians controlled the entire north of the country.

France was in chaos. Marauding armies plundered at will. The situation was desperate. In the midst of this crisis, Joan began to hear voices that told her to go to the Dauphin and save France from the invaders. Joan made her way to the Dauphin's court at Chinon in the Loire Valley and convinced Charles to allow her to lead

his armies. Legend has it that when Joan went to meet the Dauphin, he devised a test for her. He disguised himself, hid in the crowd while Joan was led to a courtier sitting on the throne. Joan was not fooled, but immediately found Charles hiding in the background. She fell on her knees to greet him. This scene has often been cited as proof of Joan's divine mission. Charles accepted her offer of aid.

Joan immediately won a critical battle, liberating the besieged city of Orléans. This crucial victory allowed her to bring the Dauphin to Rheims for his coronation as Charles VII. After winning some more battles, she was captured at Compiègne, brought to Rouen, and put on trial as a heretic and a witch. She was prosecuted by Pierre Cauchon, the Archbishop of Beauvais. The charges brought against her were religious in nature and not military. The ecclesiastical court found her guilty as charged. She was burned at the stake on May 30, 1431. Even in death however she continued to inspire her troops. The French army finally repulsed the English and rid the country of the invaders. Twenty-five years after her death, at the instigation of King Charles, the Catholic Church annulled its previous verdict and Pope Calixtus III declared Joan innocent of all charges of heresy and witchcraft.

Joan thus entered history as the ultimate patriot,

the virgin warrior (la Pucelle, the Maid of Orléans) who rescued her king and saved her country. The negative role of the Catholic church in her trial and execution was passed over, in part at least due to her rehabilitation in 1456. Similarly, the fact that Charles abandoned her after her capture and made no effort to rescue her was also forgotten. All the blame fell on the English. She was, as François Villon stated in his poem about the great heroines in French history ("La Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis," 1461), "Jeanne la bonne Lorraine qu'Anglois brulèrent à Rouen." [the good Joan from Lorraine whom the English burned at Rouen]

Joan was henceforth the champion and the bulwark of the Catholic church, the army, and the monarchy. All three of those institutions basked in the reflected glory of the national heroine and her extraordinary exploits. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, the legend of Joan of Arc took a curious turn.

In 1841 the great historian Jules Michelet published the fifth volume of his monumental History of France which concentrated on Joan. In his dramatic and imaginative re-creation, Michelet exalts Joan as the soul of the nation, the embodiment of French values, and a holy victim brought low by the implacable enemies of France. She is, for him, France, she is the Nation. She is "patriotique" because she incarnates

the "Patrie", the home land. Michelet also indicted most powerfully the Catholic Church and Archbishop Cauchon for their illegal and dishonest conduct in convicting Joan. "Oui, selon la Religion, selon la Patrie, Jeanne Darc fut une sainte" [Yes, for her Religion and for her Country, Joan of Arc was a saint]. In calling Joan a saint, Michelet "reinvented Joan of Arc for the modern era," thereby "spawn[ing] virtually all of Joan's future political and artistic reincarnations" (Margolis, 59-60).

In the immediate wake of Michelet's repurposing, as we would say today, of Joan and her achievement, two phenomena took place. At first a few, then more and more Catholic prelates began to call for the canonization of Joan as a real religious saint. In part this was an effort to exonerate the Church from its guilt in Joan's execution which Michelet had pointedly emphasized. Throughout the nineteenth century, the republican, liberal Left had continually attacked the Catholic, conservative Right for the injustice it had done to Joan. Canonization would erase all memory of this lapse and re-establish the Church as a friend and ally of this patriotic heroine. Joan would cease to be a cudgel to beat the Church with. On the contrary she would become its buckler and its shield.

The second phenomena magnified the first. In Joan the artistic world found a new inspiration, a new

subject. Statues of Joan began to appear in Paris and in the major provincial cities. The period from 1870 to 1914 has been called the "golden period of statuemanía": over 150 statues of Joan were erected in Paris alone during that period (3.m). They were usually placed in an important civic space or next to a church. Frequently they depicted a victorious and exuberant Joan on horseback, her sword drawn and brandished high above her head. Alternatively she would be seen on foot, in full armor, looking pensive or prayerful, perhaps holding a flag. Painters were able to add background and color to this evocative image. Since there was relatively little historical information or descriptions to guide them, these painters pictured Joan in a blond pageboy haircut, blue eyed, and with a creamy white complexion. In shining armor she would often be standing before a church altar in prayer and meditation. Almost always she held a flag with yellow fleurs-de-lys, the traditional symbol of the monarchy, on a deep blue background. Incidentally, blue was the color of the Blessed Virgin, Mary the Mother of God, an association all to Joan's advantage. Sometimes her flag was white, the traditional color of the monarchy. There were some depictions of her burning at the stake, calm in her saintly assurance of innocence while the ugly and revolting English encouraged the flames. Relatively few tableaux or statues show her as the

peasant girl or as the prisoner on trial.

With little if any attempt at historical accuracy, these artistic representations helped create Joan the icon, that extraordinary and most attractive vessel to be filled with new content. As France traversed a number of crises in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Joan acquired new meaning as symbol and memory of a victorious and virtuous France.

In 1870, the Franco-Prussian war broke out and Bismarck's army swiftly defeated the French and toppled the Second Empire. Napoléon III fled into exile. The Germans invaded and took over the whole north of the country. After hostilities with the Germans ceased, civil war broke out in Paris, in a particularly traumatic episode known as the Commune. French soldiers fired on French civilians. The Commune remains to this day a highly charged emotional and political memory, with both the Right and the Left fighting over how to interpret it and, more important, who to blame for it.

The rapidity of the army's defeat and the ease with which the Germans walked into France provoked a major crisis that shook the country's pride and its sense of honor. How could they lose so ignominiously? The French simply could not believe the extent of their unprecedented defeat which took barely six months.

Their army had been humiliated on the battlefield. Their Emperor who was a continuation of the King under another name had been chased from his throne with incredible ease. As the replacement government turned into a republic, the very principle of monarchy was destroyed. What had happened, and more importantly why? Who was responsible, who was guilty of this disgrace?

Given this extensive soul-searching, the collective consciousness turned its eyes to a hero who could, at least in their imagination, reverse that defeat and restore the lost national honor: Joan. In the past, when France had confronted disaster, Joan appeared out of nowhere and led the country to victory. Chosen by God for this gigantic undertaking (the celestial voices she heard), she restored the legitimate government to power, led the army to glorious victory, and repulsed the detested invaders. Where was she now that France had most need of her? Significantly, a statue of Joan was commissioned by the French government immediately after the war. It was completed and erected in 1874 on the Place des Pyramides, the spot where according to legend Joan had been wounded during an unsuccessful attempt to retake Paris from the enemy (3.m). This historical allusion and the government's official participation made the statue all the more potent. Starting the following

year, L'Union Nationale, a conservative Catholic organization, began to gather about the statue every May to demonstrate their devotion to Joan in her dual roles as defender of the faith and military hero (Brown, 207).

Other bits and pieces fit easily into the heroic narrative of Joan the badly needed and much longed-for champion. As part of the peace treaty, Germany annexed two French provinces, Alsace and Lorraine. Lorraine was, of course, Joan's birthplace. Its loss was thus doubly difficult to accept. Both provinces would remain an integral part of Germany until the end of World War I. The defeat and invasion of 1870-71 had turned into a permanent, albeit partial, occupation by the enemy, disfiguring and dismembering the nation. Rancor over Alsace and Lorraine would poison Franco-German relations for over a generation and inspire a desire for retribution. Revanchisme --national vengeance-- dominated French feeling for half a century and was a permanent factor in the political calculations of the times. The statue of Joan on the Place des Pyramides reflected this post-war mentality.

By 1894, public pressure in France finally convinced the Vatican to open the process of canonization for Joan. She would be beatified in 1906 and canonized in 1920.

That same year, a seemingly cut-and-dried incident took place that metastasized for over five years into a huge scandal that divided France into two bitterly antagonistic camps and that rocked the Army to its core. A spy was discovered in the War Office who was passing military secrets to the hated Germany, reviving memories of the army's disgraceful defeat 24 years before. Suspicion fell on Lieutenant Alfred Dreyfus who was quickly cashiered from the military (December 1894), tried and found guilty, and deported two months later to Devil's Island, known popularly as the "dry guillotine." Dreyfus's friends however were sure he was innocent. For several years they tried unsuccessfully to gather evidence in his favor and to convince government officials to review the case. Arguing for Dreyfus' innocence was difficult if not impossible because the Army had tried him in secret and never divulged the evidence against him. Dreyfus's lawyer never saw the proof that the Army claimed was unimpeachable, nor did the jury that convicted him. When the dossier finally did come to light, it contained nothing but obviously forged documents. As more people began to question the very suspicious process that had led to Dreyfus's conviction, the Army stone-walled and refused any request to defend its decision or review its evidence. This cover-up included the uppermost echelon of military officers.

Thus the army closed ranks and deemed anyone supporting Dreyfus unpatriotic and even a traitor. Public opinion split between those in favor of and those opposed to Dreyfus. This cleavage turned friends against each other and fomented bitter polemics on both sides.

Perhaps the most damning charge against Dreyfus was never mentioned in the official docket. He was a Jew. The usual low level of anti-Semitism endemic in French high society and in the upper ranks of the military had been pushed to new levels of intolerance by Edouard Drumont's La France Juive (1886). Drumont catalogued the names of some 3,000 French Jews and their fellow travelers who, in his view, had inflicted grievous harm on the country. He particularly emphasized the collapse of an important bank, the Union Générale, and the economic crisis its bankruptcy caused. Drumont claimed that this krasch of 1882 was proof that the Rothschilds --and therefore Jews in general--exerted a nefarious control over French finances. The book was a best seller and went through 200 reprintings by 1914. It was copied in tone and format by authors in other countries. Along with the Protocols of the Elders of Sion, this is one of the foundational texts of virulent anti-Semitism (3.0).

Ever since 1870 the iconography of Joan, mentioned earlier, had been creating literally a new and powerful image of the pure-blooded Frenchman. These near

hagiographic representations of a fair-haired and blue-eyed Joan had established a standard for judging the French physical and moral ideal. During the 1890s, a newly prosperous France was attracting immigrants, mostly Italians and Poles, to work in its mining and steel-making industries. Nativists denounced these immigrants, many of whom were neither blond nor blue-eyed, as foreign invaders who would pollute pure French blood. One deputy named Beauregard, introduced a bill in December 1897 that would protect France from "rampant infiltration by agents of foreign powers," that is immigrants, most especially Jews and Poles. This influx would, he claimed, eventually erase France as a nation from the map of Europe. Furthermore, the bill stipulated that those of Jewish origin would be denied access to government jobs. Only the second generation, born in France, would qualify (Brown, 247-8). The bill was not passed, but even proposing it spoke volumes about the pervasive fear and loathing of foreign immigrants. Such xenophobia magnified the growing anti-Semitism that had been fanned to white heat by Drumont. Joan was pure French while Dreyfus was a degenerate Jew, a half-breed, a mongrel. Born in Alsace, now part of Germany, he was also considered one of the hated Germans. And so Dreyfus's race (if we can use that inaccurate term) constituted an unpardonable crime that was as serious as the charges of espionage.

While the incontrovertible truth about Dreyfus's innocence was coming to light, and after Emile Zola's incendiary attack on the army, J'Accuse, appeared in January 1898, the High Court of Appeals annulled the conviction and demanded a new trial. In September 1899, the Army tried Dreyfus a second time and found him guilty again. A few days later he was pardoned by the French President Emile Loubet. Dreyfus was not declared innocent however until 1906 when the High Court overturned the army's verdict and reinstated him with the rank of captain. Dreyfus served honorably in the First World War.

Beyond the questions of jurisprudence, the anti-dreyfusards invoked Joan to justify their revulsion against Dreyfus. Born like Joan in Lorraine, Maurice Barrès was a famous writer whose novels depicted the deep connection between Frenchmen and the French soil. A right-wing politician and outspoken opponent of Dreyfus, he proclaimed that one man's innocence was insignificant when weighed against the honor of the nation and the army (Brown, 207-8). Joan provided the moral example that Dreyfus failed to emulate. Joan died at the stake in her nation's cause, she sacrificed her life as a loyal soldier. In contrast, Dreyfus's defenders did not place the honor of the army above the life of one man.

As the century closed, Joan was well embarked on her journey toward sainthood and her special political symbolism. We have just seen how her heroic narrative could serve the interests of the army. We turn now to how she became closely identified with the politics of the Catholic Church and the monarchy.

The defeat in 1870 had caused the collapse of the Second Empire which had been created in 1851 in a coup d'etat led by Louis Napoléon (Napoléon III), the nephew of Bonaparte. It was replaced by the Third Republic. Traditional conservatives were aghast at the change. Royalists were hoping for a return of the king, and the Orléans branch of the royal family was waiting in the wings for a restoration. Ever since the early days of the century traditional Catholics objected strongly to the politics of republicans whom they considered secular humanists, democrats, and atheists. Unlike Catholicism which was always closely associated with the monarchy, republicanism favored the separation of church and state, a policy which climaxed in a treaty with the Vatican in 1905. In addition, republicans were anti-clerical by tradition. Ever since the French Revolution they regarded priests as reactionary supporters of the king and thus enemies of the ideals of 1789: liberty, equality, fraternity.

A great deal of the conflict between the secular republic and the Catholic Church centered on

education. From time immemorial, the Church had a monopoly on primary education. The republic now was challenging that hegemony by making primary education "free, compulsory, and secular" (law of 1882). Four years earlier it had organized a network of normal schools to educate republican teachers. These *instituteurs* fought a long and hard battle with the local curates for the minds of their young pupils. One very influential history/geography textbook used throughout the secular system, La Tour de France par deux enfants, portrayed Joan of Arc as a "sublime innocent who thought she heard voices." But Joan was definitely not "a supernaturally guided instrument of salvation" (Brown, 82). Six million of these textbooks were sold by 1900. However, it was surely read by many more who used copies provided by the schools. For the republic Joan's heroism had nothing to do with religion. Conflict was inevitable.

In 1903, Amadée Thalamas published a book entitled Joan of Arc: The History and the Legend. He was a rationalist and a positivist, an ideological position that was squarely at odds with the Catholic Church's reliance on faith and its injunction to obey established authority. The following year, he taught a course at the prestigious Lycée Condorcet in Paris. There he denounced what he called "Jeannolâtrie" (Joan-idolatry, the term he gave to the cult-like

adoration of Joan) and tried to separate the historical facts from the growing legend and its pseudo-events. His students' conservative, prosperous, and traditional parents raised a hue and cry against what they considered an insult to Joan. The nationalistic press joined in. Thalamas was transferred to another school and publicly rebuked by the Minister of Public Instruction.

In 1908 Thalamas was again in the midst of controversy. He had been invited to give a weekly series of free public lectures at the Sorbonne on the writing of history, that is on how historians go about their task of selecting material and then analyzing it. "Free courses" like these were not part of any regular university curriculum. They were more like Chautauqua lectures or the presentations given at the Humanities Festival in Chicago every fall. Sometimes they were even social events where fashionable persons went to be seen rather than to learn.

The Right saw these lectures as a provocation. A group of extreme right-wing thugs, the *Camelots du Roi*, protested and picketed these lectures every week for three months. Afterwards they would clash with the police outside the Sorbonne building. After each confrontation they would lay flowers at the base of a statue of Joan. At the eleventh and next to last session (15 March 1909), the Camelots invaded the lecture hall

and attacked Thalamas physically. They pulled down his pants and administered a violent and humiliating spanking there in public. (1) The police arrested seven of the perpetrators each of whom received a six-month prison sentence. They included some of the most prominent leaders of the group: Maxime Réal del Sarte, Maurice Pujo, Marius Plateau, and Lucien Lacour. The Camelots considered all of them heroes who had defended Joan's and therefore the nation's honor.

The *Camelots du Roi* (the King's street vendors) provide us with a dramatic and essential link between Joan on one hand, and the church, the royalists, and the political right wing on the other. They were founded in 1908 by Maurice Pujo as the fighting wing of the extreme far-right political party Action Française, which itself had been founded in 1897 again by Pujo and others. Its current leader was the extreme right-wing xenophobe Charles Maurras who was in addition both a racist and a royalist. He and his followers detested the republic and its parliamentary government; they wanted to restore the monarchy and one-man rule. It might seem incredible to us today but at the turn of the last century the pro-monarchy forces were numerous, strong, and violent. Action Française remained resolutely anti-Dreyfus even after he was pardoned in 1899. Maurras edited and wrote extensively for a journal with the same name as the

party: officially it was La Revue de l'Action Française, but it is most often referred to simply as Action Française in italics. The avowed purpose of Action Française, both the party and the journal, was to "engager la guerre d'indépendance nationale contre les factions qui avaient mis la main sur l'Etat français." (1) [to wage a war of national independence against those factions that had placed their heel upon the French state] The Camelots even had their marching song whose lyrics were an accurate expression of their politics. Here are some of their stated --or rather sung-- political intentions:

Long live the King, down with the Republic ...
 We the Camelots don't give a damn about the law...
 We will hang the Whore (ie the republic)
 We will hang all the députés (2)

As I mentioned earlier, the Camelots were organized as the street-fighting wing ("une organization de combat") of Action Française. They claimed to use "violence in the service of reason" in the words of Lucien Lacour (1). Their self-proclaimed objective was to "restaurer une monarchie traditionnelle, héréditaire, antiparlementaire, et décentralisée" using "tous les moyens, même légaux." (3.a) [to restore a traditional, hereditary, decentralized monarchy without a parliament" and this "by all means possible, even legal ones"] As early as

1909 the police considered the Camelots the most troublesome and dangerous of all the right-wing groups in Paris. (Weber, 55) They were easily recognizable because they carried a lead-weighted cane in one hand, their weapon of choice for violent street confrontations, and a book in the other, a reference to Action Française the journal. They would sell this and other royalist publications in front of churches before and after Sunday mass. They began in the prosperous, bourgeois, and conservative 17th arrondissement, then expanded their sales network to all of Paris. Originally a weekly, Action Française eventually became a daily newspaper. Hawking royalist publications was in fact the reason for their name, The King's Street Vendors. But they were better known for organizing "manifestations," political demonstrations and rallies, public marches that most often ended in violent physical confrontations with the police and their republican opponents.

Beginning in 1908, they began to stage annual parades in honor of Joan of Arc, now beatified and on her way to canonization. These usually took place on the second Sunday of May. In so doing the Camelots took over and injected a new political and violent element into the here-to-fore peaceful celebrations that had begun around Joan's statue on the Place des Pyramides in 1875. The Camelots would end their annual marches

by laying flowers at the foot of a statue of Joan somewhere in the city. Laying wreaths at Joan's feet became one of their identifying gestures. These marches helped make the new image of Joan "exclusif, univoque, agressif" [exclusive, single-minded, aggressive]: Joan was becoming "célébrée comme la sainte patronne de l'extreme droite" (Winock, 708) [celebrated as the patron saint of the extreme right]

Marching in parades and selling newspapers was not all the Camelots did. One of their leaders, Lucien Lacour, slapped Aristide Briand in the face on 20 November 1910 while Briand was participating in an official state ceremony honoring Jules Ferry, the Minister of Education who had been the architect of the Republic's school reforms in the 1880s. At the time Briand was the Président du Conseil, more or less the Prime Minister. He had a distinguished political career, serving the Republic in many capacities including Minister of Foreign Affaires.

In February 1911, the Camelots staged violent demonstrations against a play by Henri Bernstein, Après Moi, at the Comédie Française. (Weber, 83; Tannenbaum, 100). Bernstein was a Jew and a deserter. His play tried to justify his actions and cast the Army in a negative light. Not only did the Camelots picket outside the theater, but some of them got inside and

heckled the actors on stage. To prevent further commotion the government persuaded the author to withdraw his play.

The following year Raymond Poincaré, the conservative Prime Minister, officially sanctioned the Camelots' May march. "Previous governments had instructed the police to break up these demonstrations, but now the cult of the national heroine had official recognition." (Tannenbaum, 140)

In May 1914, 50,000 Camelots (surely an exaggeration since it was their own count) began their annual march at Saint Augustin church. This church was constructed in 1871 just after the Franco-Prussian War, and so had historical echoes of the great defeat. A statue of Joan by Paul Dubois had been erected in the public place in front of the church in 1901 (3.n). The Camelots finished their march, as per tradition, by laying wreaths at the foot of Joan's statue on the Place des Pyramides.

World War I brought destruction and despair to France. The debacle can perhaps be best seen in demographic terms. France lost 1.7 million dead and another 4.26 million wounded out of a total population of 39.6 million. Since most casualties were men, who constituted only half the total population, that means roughly 6 million out of 20 million young men, or

approximately one out of every 3.5, were killed or horribly maimed. These horrific losses impacted the next two decades enormously. Since death took so many potential fathers, the birth rate plummeted. The injuries of most of the wounded were so serious that they did not become the vigorous, able-bodied adults the country needed. As high as these figures are, they do not include the "shell shocked" who were routinely derided as malingering cowards. Today we know that PTSD is a serious malady, that it affects enormous numbers of combat troops, and that it makes reintegration into civil society most difficult. This incredible catastrophe condemned a huge percentage of women to spinsterhood or left them widows. Since the war was entirely fought on French soil, its towns, crops, and the land itself were all decimated. Nothing grew for decades in the fields where the battle of Verdun took place so thick were the shells, the shrapnel, and the other detritus of war on that ravaged landscape.

Understandably, the 1920s did not roar in France as they did in the United States. Such a negative situation created a fertile breeding ground for political and social resentments. The crash in 1929 only aggravated an already fraught situation. When war returned in 1939-40, France still had not recovered from its disastrous "victory" in World War I.

Throughout the 20s and 30s a number of extreme

far-right political groups inspired by Action Française and the Camelots took to the streets, organizing demonstrations and provoking violence. These right-wing neo-facist "ligues," like le Faiseau, les Jeunesses Patriotiques, and les Croix de feu, all acknowledged Joan as their inspiration: "Toutes les ligues de l'époque se réclament de Jeanne d'Arc" [all the right-wing groups of this period proclaimed their allegiance to Joan] (Winock, 718). They aligned themselves ideologically with Mussolini and later Hitler. All these "leagues" that looked to Joan for inspiration were virulently anti-Semitic, xenophobic, and racist. Not surprisingly, Joan became the standard bearer for those on the extreme Right who detested "Jews, Free Masons, intellectuals, Protestants, socialists, and recent immigrants" (3.b).

The Camelots especially did not shun violence. Many of them were incarcerated multiple times, which only augmented their status among their comrades. They consistently broke up government sponsored ceremonies. At public political meetings they would infiltrate a hall in order to interrupt the proceedings and then physically chase speakers off the stage.

But what goes around comes around. Marius Plateau was assassinated by an anarchist, Germaine Berton, on 22 January 1923 while he was seated in his own headquarters. Berton was actually looking for Charles

Maurras or Léon Daudet, two other Action Française leaders. Unable to find them, she settled on Plateau. She was acquitted of murder charges due to mental instability later that year. Plateau's death provoked intense Camelot rage. Among a number of violent incidents that spring, the Camelots attacked Marc Sangnier, a Catholic social activist and founder of a progressive youth movement called Le Sillon; Joseph Caillaux, a prominent politician and former minister; and several socialist députés. (Tannenbaum, 202-3)

In May 1925, the parish priest of Saint Augustin blessed the statue of Joan in front of his church to start off the Camelots' annual march despite a ban imposed by the government. The march lasted into the afternoon and ended with laying flowers at Joan's statue in the Place des Pyramides. Unmoved by such gestures of support from the French Catholic Church, Pope Pius XI condemned Maurras and placed his journal Action Française on the Church's Index of forbidden books on December 29, 1926.

As the Republic inched further to the left in the elections of the late 20s and early 30s, the Camelots engaged in more protests, more demonstrations, more street fighting. The annual May marches in Joan's honor continued unabated. On 29 November 1930 the Camelots broke up a public lecture on the topic "Germany and Us" that was sponsored by the League for

the Rights of Man (1). The following year, they forced a play they disliked to close just as they had done in 1911. From 14 February until 30 March, they picketed the Théâtre de l'Ambigu which was presenting a play by Jacques Richepin about the Dreyfus Affair. The Camelots considered the play too pro-German, too full of "mud and blood." On 28 March, a sub-group, the Association Marius Plateau, named after the fallen leader, issued a call to war veterans and all "patriots" to come and "show their indignation by crying out: Conspuez Dreyfus, hors les Boches, vive la France!" (1). (Smear/heckle Dreyfus, drive out the Huns/Bochs, long live France!) Clashes between police and Camelots led by Pujo, del Réal, and others continued through the night of the 30th all over Paris, from the Place de La République to Monmartre. (1). This was, remember, 31 years after Dreyfus's pardon, 24 years after his conviction was overturned, and 13 years after Alsace and Lorraine were reunited with France. The following day, the play closed.

The political victory of the Cartel des Gauches (the unified Left) in the legislative elections of 1932 only served to intensify the right-wing backlash punctuated by street fighting and physical confrontations with police and republican organizations.

One particularly bloody confrontation between the

Camelots and the police took place on February 6, 1934. In a concerted plan with the other right-wing organisations, the Camelots marched on the Chambre des Députés, hoping to disrupt proceedings and perhaps assault a legislator or two. Repulsed by the police, the Camelots retreated across the Seine River to the Place de la Concorde. Fighting broke out there, leaving 14 dead and 57 seriously injured. (Weber, 332) In Action Française, Léon Daudet claimed with typical exaggeration that "thousands" were wounded. This confrontation is considered one of the most serious political challenges faced by the Third Republic. Many at that time feared a civil war would erupt and split the country between the left and the right.

While they were marching in a funeral procession on February 13, 1936, in honor of the royalist professor Jacques Bainville, the Camelots happened upon a car in which Léon Blum was riding. Blum was a député and would become Prime Minister in April. They attacked the car and beat Blum so severely that he had to be hospitalized. Reacting immediately, the government dissolved both Action Française and the Camelots, and sentenced Maurras to eleven months in prison.

During World War II, Vichy claimed Joan as an inspiration and a model for preserving the so-called

"legitimate" government. De Gaulle, who saw himself as a Joan of Arc figure, was disparaged as a traitor and ally of the traditional enemy, the English, because he took refuge in London. After the war, Joan was largely ignored because of the disgrace visited upon the right-wing neo-fascists of the 30s. Most of those who had proclaimed her so loudly became collaborators during the war. One of the heroes mentioned in the "Chanson des Camelots," Léon Daudet, died in 1942 before the war ended. Two others, however, were put on trial and convicted of collaboration. Maurice Pujo received a sentence of five years in prison; Charles Maurras got a life sentence. He defended himself by saying that he could not have collaborated because he had always hated Germans. When the final verdict was read to him, he exclaimed: That's Dreyfus's revenge!" [C'est la revanche de Dreyfus] (François L'Yvonnet)

Joan had a brief revival more recently thanks to Jean-Marie Le Pen, the racist and xenophobic leader of Le Front National, who wants to expel all Muslims, indeed all non-white non-Christians, from France. On May 1st, 2002, between the two rounds of the presidential election in which he was one of the final two candidates, Le Pen gathered his followers around Joan's statue on the Place des Pyramides (3.m). This was an obvious imitation of the Camelots' annual marches. Le Pen could not have been clearer in

declaring his political and ideological antecedents.

And so ends the odyssey of Joan of Arc. Her exploits did not change, her accomplishment remained the same throughout the centuries: military hero, devoted pillar of the monarchy, faithful Catholic.

Nonetheless, in the process of becoming a saint, Joan also became a right-wing neo-fascist idol. Let us pray that in the future this national hero and ultimate patriot will be better served by better admirers.

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This site is maintained by admirers of the Camelots. I have found some of its information to be suspect since I have not been able to corroborate it with reputable academic scholars.

2. You Tube: "La Chanson des Camelots"

Le Chant des Camelots

Vive les Camelots du Roi, ma mère, vive les Camelots
Ce sont des gens qui se foutent des lois, vive les Camelots
Et l'on s'en fout, A bas la République
Et l'on s'en fout de la Gueuse et de ses voyous
Vive la Royauté, ma mère, vie la Royauté
Il nous la faut pour cet été, vive la Royauté
Et vive le roi, à bas la république
Et vive le roi, La France y va tout droit
Vive Charles Maurras, ma mère, vive Charles Maurras
C'est notre maitre, et c'est un as, vive Charles Maurras
Il disait vrai, il prévoyait la guerre

Il disait vrai, la Gueuse nous désarmait
 Vive Léon Daudet, ma mère, vive Léon Daudet
 Il pend les tueurs au collet, vive Léon Daudet
 Les égorgeurs de la police politique
 Tremblent de peur à sa juste fureur
 Vive Maurice Pujo, ma mère, vive Maurice Pujo
 Il est la terreur des sergos, vive Maurice Pujo
 Et vive le roi, à bas la republique, et vive le roi
 La gueuse on la pendra, A la lanterne
 Et si on ne la pend pas, on lui cassera la gueule
 Et si on ne la pend pas, la gueule on lui cassera
 Ah ça ira, ça ira, ça ira, tous les députés à la lanterne
 Ah ça ira, ça ira, ça ira, Tous les députés on les pendra
 Vive le Duc de Guise ma mère, vive le Duc de Guise
 Servir la France est sa devise, vive le Duc de Guise
 Vive le Roi A bas la république
 Vive le roi qui défendra nos droits

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- i. Marius Plateau
- j. Paul Déroulède
- k. Léon Blum
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